

UPSTAIRS BULLETIN

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An Educational Group

THE LONG INTERVAL between the last Bulletin and this one was spent taking care of health problems -- serious enough to have no vacation trip during August and the balance of the time spent enduring radium therapy, leaving only strength enough for the necessary daily activities. This Bulletin has been in preparation since last June. Much of the news is no and take us for granted. It is nice to be remembered. who have stopped in to visit with us. We have been around so long that many of our earliest friends forget and take us for granted. It is nice to be remembered.

Among the avalanche of visitors in June -- **Suzette Pompei**, now pretty well established as a Canadian in Montreal, in a modern dance Company, was in to catch up on old friends. In her last season with us she was the "Red Queen" of "Alice in Wonderland". **Louise Wykell** is now well established in the Alvin Nicolai Dance Company and had much to tell about her activities in that group. **Sandra Lemley**, from Loveland, Colorado, was in the school with Karen Krych and Polly Harding and has pretty well kept in contact with those of her time. She now runs a successful Ballet School of her own. **Mary Randolph** and husband, home on a visit from the Eliot Feld Ballet (due here this month), seemed to have changed very little, except for a finer edge on her work. **Isabel Browne** and her sister, **Elizabeth Lang**, came and we enjoyed a nice family dinner together. Of the Dance Festival dance stars, we naturally enjoyed **Naomi Sorkin** as a very welcome relief from all the *Pas de deux*'s. We were not alone in enjoying her beautiful solos, as reviews and the public attested. Had at the same time a welcome visit with **Aviva** and **Leonard Sorkin** (Fine Arts Quartet) of whom we are both extremely fond.

A real surprise was **Scott Schlexer** and **Vannessa Merla** walking in together. SCOTT is in American Ballet Theatre and VANNESSA is home from Lubeck, Germany, where she has been dancing for the past four years in the Lubeck Opera Ballet. Recently read the biography of Thomas and Heinrich Mann who began their careers in Lubeck -- so can understand Vannessa's fascination with the old city. SCOTT was just recovering from a severe case of Meningitis and is just working his way back into the Company repertoire. Always a happy and jolly visitor, **Gildo di Nunzio** comes loaded with gossip and back stage stories of

the Metropolitan Opera Company. While the company plays in Detroit he escapes to Chicago for a visit -- a more entertaining person does not exist. **Jack Sebert**, now in the paper business in Menasha, Wisconsin, turns up whenever there is an Opera performancebe it the Lyric or **Alan Stone's** fine group. **Chuck** and **Virginia Gannon**, in for a day from Glen Ellyn and fresh back from their world travels. VIRGINIA was one of our very first accompanists. Messages are always turning up from **Father John Walsh** from many parts of the world . . . this time from China.

John Neumeler is always news -- seems he has resided in Hamburg, Germany for seven years with the promise of them building him a Ballet School and renovating a theatre for his ballet production. Could such a thing happen here in Chicago? I can answer that for you -- it is definitely "NO". **Jo Jean Retrum** brought a fine, young group of her dancers in for the summer course. She is doing a great job. **Paula** and **Alan Baker** have really settled in at the University of New Mexico (Albuquerque), teaching and directing stage and TV productions. PAULA recently wrote that her physician was a former SC pupil -- and so he was -- **Michael Finnegan**, and his sister, **Suzy**, came in from Racine. One never knows when you have a pupil how they will end up.

After I got out of the hospital we had a wonderful visit with **Spiro Pastos** that did wonders for my respect for humanity. SPIRO was not really a dancer -- a folk singer really -- but I was amazed at how much more interest he maintained in his fellow students than do the dance students. When I gave my "first" Farewell Concert on April 28, 1957, he was an important part of that program. That was not my last program, but my last SOLO program -- a difference. SPIRO sang "I Gave My Love a Cherry" - "As I Walked Out in The Streets of Lorado" - "Bohemian Lullaby" and "Delia". Also on that program, **Patrick Cummings** danced with me in "Dr. Eli Duffy" and "Swanee", as well as a solo dance, "A Winter's Night". While in Las Vegas, SPIRO visited with PAT, who is now a successful director of the shows for one of the large hotels. PAT could have been one of our best ballet stars -- but one must be persistent, deaf to false advice and have some ability to take some discouragement. But the nice thing is tha Spiro still feels Pat could have been a Barishnikov. In the revival of "Most Happy Fella" is a dancing part

for a young boy and in this version, **Dean Badolato** has the part. In the original production, it was **John Sharp**, and when he left the show, **James Moore** took over the part. All three were excellent character dancers and all **Stone/Camryn** trained. We hear that **Naomi Sorkin** is to have a spread in the November issue of the "Dance Magazine". Within the next month she will be presenting her solo concert in New York. We would all love to be there.

PERFORMING IN CHICAGO

'During the Depression Years'

When one first begins to perform -- it is best with a major organization -- group -- or some production where they are only a part and can share in the glories. Glancing back over the Chicago scene, I seem to have been a part of so many phases of Chicago's theatrical life -- opera, ballet, concerts, vaudeville, night clubs and pageants. I dare say, looking back, that I have done more performances than most dancers -- or actors -- for I have been both. While we did not make much money during the 30's, many interesting things were accomplished.

In the autumn of 1928, I auditioned for Veschlav Swoboda for an opening in the Chicago Civic Opera Ballet. I had been rehearsing with the Adolph Bolm Ballet, which in time was to have a short tour. When this chance came up, Mr. Bolm reasoned with me that the Opera was 28 weeks of work and I could not overlook it.

On October 31st of that year I was in my first professional performance in the beautiful old Auditorium Theatre. The Opera was "Carmen" with a cast which included Renee Maison, Maria Olszewska, Desire Dufrere, Jose Mojica, Alice Mock and Cesare Fromicki. Swoboda was the first dancer and Maria Yurieva, his wife, was his partner. This was to be the beginning of many Opera performances with different stars every time we went on stage. From 1928 thru '29, '30 and '31, we appeared in 34 American cities with 40 different Operas. The Ballet Company ranged from 40 to 60 dancers and had within its ranks dancers from the Anne Pavlowa Company, The Diaghlev Company, The Royal Danish Ballet, and The Paris Opera Ballet, as well as dancers from almost every State in the Union. During those years we danced in "Swan Lake", "Prince Igor" and "El Amor Brujo", as well as several Divertisseant programs. Those were truly fantastic years with the great singers of all time -- Mary Garden, Rosa Raisa, Claudio Muzio, Tito Scipa, John Charles Thomas, Alexander Kipnis, Elizabeth Rethberg, Lotte Lehmann and Edith Mason.

At the end of the 1931 season Laurent Novikoff, our ballet master that year, was offered a 40-week concert tour for the Ballet but no one was willing to come up with the money to put the project in motion. This was just another time when Chicago let the Ballet down. In those days the Ballet was an extremely important part of the Company (where as today the dancers are used only as supernumeraries.)

When we returned from the first Opera tour I did, in time, dance with the Adolph Bolm Ballet for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America in their Auditorium (now demolished). The same program was given later at the Chicago Art Theatre with the famous Russian movie star, Olga Baclonova, as guest. On these programs I danced two dances -- one a toy shop character dance with Albertine Chaiser (now the Albertine of Nashville, Tennessee); and a classical dance with Ann Sharkey, who later made another attempt at creating a Chicago Ballet. For that effort she brought Branislava Nijinska to do all the choreography. Needless to say, her money went down the drain as many others' have since.

The years 1933, 1934 & 1935, when the Opera's name was changed to the Chicago Grand Opera, were known as the 'Longone years'. These seasons were shorter and we all worked at drastically cut salaries to keep the Opera going. Even during these stark financial years the ballet managed to produce "Le Coq D'or" under Laurent Novikoff and "Love Song" under Ruth Page.

The years of 1936 and 1937 brought another change of name -- The Chicago City Opera Company -- and though really not glorious years, they were brightened somewhat by the appearance of Lily Pons, Grace Moore and an unfortunate comeback of Galli Curci. The Ballet under Page managed four ballets -- "American Pattern", "Hear Ye! Hear Ye!", "Gold Standard" and a repeat of "Love Song".

By 1931 Bentley Stone was teaching at the Mary Kane School of Dance in Oak Park. I was teaching in a loop school and at Riverside. In time I was added to the staff of Mary Kane's and soon we were both teaching in Berwyn, Cicero, Oak Park and Riverside. Out of those classes came John Kriza, Nikita Talin (Howard Sperling) and Betsy Ross -- all of whom had extensive dance careers -- Kriza's being worldwide.

During the depression years the Opera dancers found employment with the Balaban & Katz theatres in their stage shows. They operated a circuit of 6 or 8 theatres which did offer some work. What stands out in my mind most (because it was so ludicrous) was a tap dance I danced with Mona Dell and Bentley Stone -- both excellent at tap. They made the sounds -- I went through the motions. I did appear on my own

later in an Indian dance in red paint, up on a ten-foot pedestal while the organist pounded out Victor Herbert's "Dagger Dance".

The year 1933 was an extremely active year for Chicago dancers. The first part of May I did five pantomime roles in the Opera "Emperor Jones" with Laurence Tibbett at the Auditorium. The Opera also employed a large group of male black dancers, headed by Robert Duncan. June 9th at the Auditorium we were in a joint Ballet program with Novikoff, presenting "Prince Igor" and Page, her Ravel's "Bolero". The same week we were all dancing at the Blackstone Theatre on the 6th 8th and 10th in the ballet "Coppelia", choreographed by Michael Fokine. In October I was dancing one of the Tweedle Dees in "Alice in Wonderland" at the Punch and Judy Theatre on Van Buren Street for six weeks. After that run, many of us continued in an Intimate Musical revue called "Headlines." I had two spots for solo dances -- a classical dance and one of my first modern efforts called "Fragments of Sarcasm". Sharing the dance honors of that program was the now famous, Celeste Holm. In between all that activity I did two programs at the Jewish Peoples Institute with a partner and one at the Art Colony. I was also involved with Louise Ayer Le Gai in her program of "Cantomimes" with a program at the Evanston Drama Club. That was really a busy year. That was the first year of the World's Fair and during 1933, little was planned for entertainment.

The second year - 1934 - was another story. At the English Village, Bentley Stone had a group of the Opera dancers with which he danced and choreographed a very successful show which ran for the entire season. I was involved in a show at the Spanish Village partnering Vera Mirova and Alta Marshawska. This show ran about ten weeks and from there went into rehearsals for a dance pageant called "Century of Dance" at the Ford Symphony Gardens. I did the choreography for the Indian dances and the Square dances which were part of the pageant. Towards the end of the Fair I was one of five dancers employed to dance the Hebraic dances in the Jewish Pageant -- "Romance of The People" -- with a cast of two thousand people in Soldiers Field. This was a truly spectacular production and I was pleased to be a part of it.

In the spring of 1935 Bentley Stone was approached to do a program for the Oak Park Symphony Orchestra in which he used his Opera Friends. This was a full-scale program of two ballets and 12 Divertissements. The main ballet was "Chopiniana", featuring Stone and Ruth Pryor. The entire program was choreographed by Stone and I came out with two solos -- "Turkey in the Straw" and "Golliwog's Cake-walk". The first was to be my original entry into the use of Americana.

That same spring, we went on another Chicago Opera tour with a mixed-bag program of opera and ballet. The Stars were Maria Jeritza, Edith Mason, Coe Glade and Guiseppe Bentonelli. The ballet danced the bacchanal from the Opera "Tannhaeuser" and Ruth Page's ballet, "The Gold Standard".

Also during this same spring I was engaged to dance with Olga Valentine (a foot taller than I) in an original ballet written by Eleanor Everett Freer for the San Carlo Opera company at the Auditorium theatre.

On May 8, 1936 I danced my first solo concert in the recital hall of the Auditorium. The program included twelve solos, accompanied by Millie Domville and Margaret Baiki on the bagpipe. Three of the dances were choreographed by Bentley Stone and the rest by myself. This was the first public performance of the "Ditties", with an original score by my friend, Lora Aborn. They were to remain a popular part of many programs for the next ten years. As this was my first, all-solo effort, I was concerned about the costume changes (which I later did better by myself), so I hired Effie, Ruth Page's maid, to help with the changes. Costumes were torn off of me right and left and needed much repair for the next program. That evening was not completely satisfying to me but these friends came to many performances after that one.

This same year I danced for the Louisville Civic Arts Association with Ruth Page and Bentley Stone. The program included "Love Song", in which I danced the 'General' doing some of Page's wierd off-balance positions to be echoed by the group. In New York I got a review for my remarkable balance.

Also in 1936, I was contracted to do a popular Ballroom concert for the Annual May Day Program at Grinnel College in Grinnell, Iowa. Louise Shott, a member of the Civic Opera was my partner and we danced ten duos and several solos to represent various aspects of contemporary dance. Numbers varied from "A Kiss in the Dark", to "Underneath the Harlem Moon". The program required a great deal of work but was a delightful experience. Years later I was to do a History of Ballroom dance for 13 weeks on TV with the famous team, Maurice and Marya. The first concert was spade work for the series.

February 18, 1936 we danced for Page under Harry Zelzer at the Civic Theatre, dancing four ballets of Page's -- "Hear Ye! Hear Ye!", "Love Song", "Gold Standard" and "Iberian Monotone". Stone was the lead male dancer and I was listed as First Soloist.

That same spring we went on a tour with the Chicago City Opera, dancing the Bacanale from "Tannhauser" and Gounod's "Romeo and Juliette". In the Wagner, I was the 'white-winged' leader of the bacanale, lifted - thrown - and torn apart for Venus's benefit. We also gave "Aida", with Stone as the

featured soloist in the Grand Ballet and I danced the "Dance of the Moorish Slave" in a coat of black paint, covered with glycerine.

In between all those engagements, I was appearing with the "Carnival of Gypsies" at the Bismarck Hotel, in the Walnut Room. It was a group of six singers and three dancers. In all, I danced with that group over a period of four years, in fourteen complete shows.

While at the Bismarck, Page decided to take her ballets to New York at the Adelphi Theatre. I was released for a few days at the Bismarck to join the company. The Program was a repeat of the February 18th program.

1937 -- I danced again with the Louisville Civic Ballet -- this time with Morgot Koche in two ballets, "Chopiniana" and an original ballet called, "L'Amour Triomphateur". This was a pleasant engagement immediately after the big flood. Loved those charming people and think kindly of them to this day.

This year also marked my first engagement as a 'teacher of teachers' for the American Society of Dancing Masters -- the country's most rarified group. I owed this introduction to my good friend, Edna Lucille Baum.

1938 -- was part of a very high brow Modern-Ballet concert at the Goodman Theatre with the Saidenberg Symphonette. I do not remember if it was a group effort but, mainly, Eleanor Block was the key figure and her choice of music was Bach and Bartok. The personnel of the orchestra was interesting, as it included Leonard Sorkin, Fritz Siegel, Clara Siegel and George Sopkin.

On February 5th in '39, I gave my first, most ambitious concert at the Goodman with a group of 12 girls, including Betsy Ross, Mary Gehr, Bettina Rosay, Eloise Moore and Margot Koche. Bentley Stone choreographed a ballet, "Mercure" to Satie for the group and a solo for me -- "Casey at the Bat". This program was the first performance of my ballet "Roundelay" to the Ravel Sentimental and Noble Waltzes. Lora Aborn was represented on the program with three compositions -- "Casey at the Bat", "Hot Afternoons Have Been in Montana" and the "Ditties". This was really the beginning of many future programs.

A couple of months later I appeared with Eloise Moore in a concert at the Illinois State Normal University. "Roundelay" was a part of the program, as were excerpts from "Mercure" and the Lora Aborn numbers.

During the late 30's the Federal Theatre occupied the time of many dancers. The choreographers were Kurt and Grace Graff, Berta Oschner, Ruth Page and Bentley Stone, with Eloise Moore and Myself on the last of the list. "Frankie and Johnny" had a long and successful run at the Great Northern Theatre. It was coupled with "American Pattern" to fill out the evening. "Guns & Castanets" with choreography by Stone and Page ran later at the Blackstone and this was a series of divertissements labeled "Scrapbook". By this time, I was on the project and danced the role of Don Jose to Stone's Escamillo and Page's Carmen. The dancers in corps was an impressive group, including John Kriza, David Nillo and Kenneth MacKenzie, all of whom had important careers in Ballet Companies. Pearl Lack (Lang) was the girl to rise out of the corps.

When the Federal Theatre project closed suddenly, I had just finished choreographing "Thunder in the Hills" to Stephan Foster melodies and it was being orchestrated and designed. The dancers were so enthusiastic about it and wanted to see it in performance, so we began to look for a source. Alderman Paul Douglas heard of our plight and engaged us for his Hyde Park Jubilee at Madel Hall. To fill out the program, in a weeks time, I choreographed "That Daring Young Man" and we had a program. Douglas furnished the money for costumes and with these programs we rounded out the 30's -- a fairly prolific period for hard times.

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The above recollections are mostly from my own personal journals and I do not mean to imply that other dancers -- other choreographers -- were not equally busy. On any given week end, even during the darkest days of the depression, one had four to six programs from which to choose.

*A Happy and Prosperous Thanksgiving To All
of You and Yours....*

